

"Your Lease on Life" In Denver

By CHARLES E. PINCKNEY, M.P.H.

WHYY aren't there more health programs on television?

Probably the greatest deterrent to the production of live television shows by local health agencies is the fear that the cost is prohibitive. Perhaps it's because so few health departments have personnel with the combination of skills or talents required for production of live television shows. Then, the production of TV shows is a time-consuming activity. And, too, the job of coordinating the many elements which go into a successful series of television programs—the script-writing, the casting, the rehearsals, and the assembling of props (property items)—seems to be a formidable task.

As a result, health agencies, if they are using television, have to be satisfied with an occasional, simply conceived, live show or with one which features filmed material.

The Rocky Mountain Radio Council

The voluntary and official health agencies of Denver were faced with all these problems when the idea of sponsoring a series of TV shows on health subjects was first presented to the agency representatives at an exploratory meeting where the plan was discussed.

A new television station in Denver had written to the Colorado State Department of Health requesting the loan of health films to be used

to fill in unscheduled telecasting time. The production manager of the TV station was approached to see if he would be interested in a regularly scheduled series of health shows as a sustaining program. He favored the idea. Invitations to attend a meeting to discuss the possibility of presenting such a series were sent to all health agencies, including professional medical groups.

The original plan had been to use a film and a speaker for each show and to make a single agency solely responsible for 1 or 2 TV shows. How to achieve economy in producing the shows was the chief problem, even though the TV station agreed to give free time as a public service and to provide some assistance in production. Fortunately, an unexpected community resource changed the whole concept of the proposed series so that it was possible to consider the production of "live" programs.

This unexpected resource was the Rocky Mountain Radio Council, a nonprofit Denver organization of professional radio and television writers, directors, and producers, which offered to produce a series of live shows on a contract basis provided the health agencies would cooperate in furnishing technical information around which the shows could be built. The radio council proposed to provide the necessary technical production skills if the agencies would furnish the subject matter, consultative advice, performers, and props essential to each program.

This plan was adopted by representatives of the health groups. The project then became a cooperative venture resulting in a 25-week series of 15-minute live shows entitled "Your Lease on Life," and produced during 1953.

Cooperative Sponsorship

The problem of financing the series was solved through cooperative and voluntary contributions of money, personnel, and—that very intangible element—mutual understanding and support. A temporary finance committee proposed that contributions, which would be used only to pay for the services of the Rocky Mountain Radio Council, be made on a voluntary basis by participating agencies according to their ability to support the project.

Mr. Pinckney, health educator, State of Colorado Department of Health, received his master's degree in public health from the North Carolina Graduate School of Public Health in 1950. He conducted a generalized program of community and school health education in three western Colorado counties in 1950-52 when he was employed as a health educator by the Western Slope Tuberculosis and Health Association, Grand Junction, Colo.

The contributions were donated with the full understanding that they were made for the good of all and that they did not guarantee a specific program for a specific agency. It was also agreed that the amount of television time devoted to any subject would not be governed by the amount of money contributed by any one agency. Fund-raising of any kind, as such, would not be the subject of any program in the series. The programs to be presented as part of the series were not intended to replace any of the other educational or public information programs of the participating agencies, nor did the donation of public service time by station KBTB (Denver) preclude the donation of additional free time for other phases of agency activities. Each agency, moreover, reserved the right to edit the script of a show in which it was involved. Finally, due credit would be given to all contributing agencies during the series whether or not any single agency had a program devoted to its specific interest. At the conclusion of each show, the names of the agencies which took part in it appeared on the TV screen.

The fact that an agency had not contributed to the common budget in no way excluded it from participation in, or sponsorship of, the series. Frequently, an agency which had not indicated a particular interest in the project was persuaded to assist in a show in which it had a significant interest in the health topic under discussion.

Basic to the concept of a cooperative sponsorship for "Your Lease on Life" were these four principles:

Each show was designed to tell what was being done in the Denver metropolitan area to increase each individual's "lease on life."

Services and activities, not philosophies, were to be used as the framework of the shows.

Details and minutiae of any given subject would often have to be sacrificed in favor of audience appeal.

The programs were to tell what was being done by the efforts of several agencies, separately or in cooperation with each other, rather than to "promote" the program of any one agency.

Coordinating the Project

Since there were some 20 agencies which originally sponsored the series, it was necessary to set up some kind of structure for coordinating the activities of all agencies and for planning the sequence of programs. Accordingly, there was selected a permanent advisory committee composed of a representative of the Rocky Mountain Radio Council, the program director of station KBTB, a member of the Colorado State Medical Society, and four representatives from official and voluntary health agencies in Denver. A member of the advisory committee was made program coordinator for the entire series.

The advisory committee met periodically to select suitable topics for future shows and to outline suggested points to be presented in each. About 2 weeks before each show, the representatives of the agencies concerned with the particular health topic met with the scriptwriter and producer and other members of the staff of the radio council to plan the program in detail, to select people to appear on it, to decide which visual devices might be used, and to work out any special problems. The actual production of the show then became the concern of the radio council. A publicity committee was appointed to publicize the series.

Before the end of the series, 51 agencies had participated in 1 or more shows, and all contributing agencies, as well as many noncontributing agencies, had been listed as sponsors of the series. In all, 128 persons appeared on the programs. Most of them were medical or paramedical persons. They included physicians, dentists, nurses, public health workers, laboratory technicians, and hospital personnel. Some were professional or amateur actors.

On a limited budget, simplicity is essential. Dramatic shows with expensive sets were not attempted. On the other hand, panel discussions and long sequences of films were not considered as suitable techniques. By using amateur talent, it was found that demonstrations, capsule dramatizations, personal interviews, and "ad-libbed" conversation in an informal setting provided effective methods for getting the idea across. Whenever and wherever possible, visual aids were used to hold the attention

of the audience. It was recognized that this extensive use of "eye-catchers" sometimes resulted in a loss of cohesiveness. Each show attempted to get 1, or at most, 2 ideas across.

Shows have been presented on these and other subjects:

Blood banks of Denver.	Cancer.
Alcoholism.	Bicycle safety.
Rheumatic fever.	Mental health.
The hard-of-hearing.	Arthritis and rheumatism
Dental health.	Hospital services.
Sight conservation.	Misuse of medicine.
Orthopedically handicapped children.	First aid in civil defense.
Milk sanitation.	Effects of radiation and atomic medicine.
Rehabilitation of the handicapped.	Tuberculosis.
Rabies control.	

The program on rabies control is an example of a typical program. Representatives from the Denver Health Department, the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association, the Denver Medical Society, and the Colorado State Health Department Laboratory met with the radio council staff to plan the show on rabies control. Its central theme was "Get your pet vaccinated," and the program was built around the carefully staged vaccination of a dog.

A veterinarian, a physician, a woman with her pet dog, a health officer, and a laboratory technician appeared on the program. Short film sequences of a dog with rabies, a professional actor simulating symptoms of a human being with rabies, a laboratory technician making a smear of a dog's brain for microscopic examination for Negri bodies, a projection of a slide with Negri bodies, the use of white mice as a further test to determine the presence of the rabies virus, an oversize dog tag, and statistical summaries, by neighborhood, of the number of dogs vaccinated in Denver helped illustrate the point of the program. Participants or agencies connected with the show provided the props.

Results of the Series

Results of the TV project were measured by mail response to the programs, by reports from contact with the public received from the sponsoring agencies, and by reports from Telepulse, a nationwide television audience survey. In

certain selected programs, pamphlets, brochures, and information sheets were offered to viewers who requested free literature.

The response was gratifying. Requests came in not only from the Denver area but also from Boulder, Fort Collins, Greeley, and other towns in eastern Colorado. Unsolicited comment as passed on to the groups sponsoring the shows were almost unanimously favorable. More tangible than these, however, were the Telepulse statistics from scientific random surveys which indicated an estimated 40,000 viewers were seeing the programs each week, despite the fact that a popular commercial program was in the same time segment on Denver's only other TV station. "Your Lease on Life" lagged only three points behind this other program.

As an experiment in cooperation, if nothing else, the production of "Your Lease on Life" was an enjoyable and beneficial experience. Those persons who contributed their time by participating in the series, whether as actors reading lines, consultants planning a program, providers of some of the many program devices or visual aids, or interested committee members—all learned how much patience, cooperation, and hard work are needed for a 15-minute live TV show.

"Health of Our City" In Grand Rapids

By MORRIS BARRETT, M.P.H.

HOW did the city health department in Grand Rapids, Mich., become a producer of television programs? How did the programs

Mr. Barrett is the first health educator to be employed by the Grand Rapids (Mich.) City Health Department, with which he has been associated since September 1952. Before receiving his master's degree in public health from the University of Michigan School of Public Health in June 1952, Mr. Barrett had 3 years' teaching experience in health education in New York City, 1948-51.
